

ACC Catalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



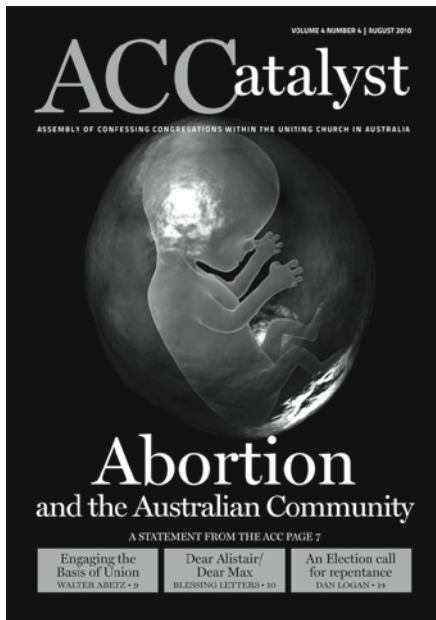
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Cover illustration © Max Delson Martins Santos

EDITORIAL

Behind the news

In this edition *ACCatalyst* takes readers behind the scenes with a series of letters between ACC Chair Dr Max Champion and the President of the UCA's National Assembly, Rev Alistair Macrae.

The story tells itself in these letters - there's no need to summarise here.

When you read the letters carefully the tone is fascinating. They reveal a situation where two groups really are trying to communicate, but can't come to agreement. You can sense the frustration on both sides.

Both Champion and Macrae are careful, clear communicators. By the end of the letters we have a good idea of what each of them thinks, what drives them and how painful they each find the dispute they are

writing about. And they should be commended for being clear when many christian leaders are not.

I am not sure there is any good model for conservative and progressive factions in a church to resolve the issue of gay marriage or blessings. The experiences of confessing movements whether Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian can be one of victory or defeat, or more often unremitting conflict.

The "confessing movements" is a term used to describe those like ACC that seek to reverse the slide in historic protestant denominations, towards Liberalism. Believe it or not the debate in the UCA is politer than others. But still grim.

John Sandeman

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Being chosen

My cat Rubey has no idea how much I do for her. I spend my money on kitty litter and cat food. She doesn't thank me. And I know I must only buy tuna cat food.

If I were to get anything else she would turn her nose up and refuse to eat it. I feed her, I clean her water dish, I empty her tray. I let her out at first light in the morning when I would rather stay in bed.

In winter I brush her to keep her free from tangles. Year round, I work hard to get her fur out of the carpet, off the furniture and my clothes.

But I don't resent the things

I do for my cat. You see, I chose her.

I went to the Animal Welfare League on 12th March 2002 and looked at lots and lots of cats.

I decided to choose one to keep as my cat, and I chose a fluffy black and white cat whom I named Rubey.

I willingly took upon myself the



responsibility of taking care of her, and I did it because I knew having her would bring me happiness.

God says, "Robyn (or you can put your name here) has no idea how much I do for her.

"I keep her alive day by day, I protect her, I guide her. I provide for her and I forgive her when she sins against me. I spend time with her. I listen to her prayers and respond. I take her burdens upon myself.

"She simply doesn't understand all I do for her, nor does she fully comprehend the sacrifice I made for her."

And yet, God says, "I don't resent the things I do for Robyn (or for you!). You see I chose her. I formed her and made her and I chose her to be my own child. I willingly took upon myself the responsibility of taking care of her because I love her and I knew that she would bring me much happiness."

God's love for us goes way beyond our comprehension!

Robyn

ACC NEWS



Angela Shanahan

Strong speakers for ACC conference

This year's ACC annual conference features a strong line-up of lively and well-informed speakers addressing the conference theme of Marriage and Family in the 21st Century.

The conference and the AGM will be held September 2 - 4, commencing formally with worship at 1.30 pm on Thursday September 2. Two speakers will address us during the main sessions of the conference, and at the public rally Joanne Lucas (see profile below) will speak on "Building up a culture of life in a feminist world".

A new feature this year is a choice of electives, and once again, time for state movements to get together.

"We are hopeful that members will increasingly support these networks and consider how they can serve the confessing movement locally", says ACC secretary Walter Abetz. "The whole conference and AGM will build on previous conferences where a growing warm fellowship in Christ has been evidenced and will help members be encouraged to faithfully witness to the Gospel."

SPEAKERS

● Steve Estherby graduated from Sydney College of Divinity with a BTh. He served as a minister of local UCA congregations for 20 years before taking on the role of NSW State Officer for Family Voice, and is well-known in reforming circles for his past leadership roles in EMU, Reforming Alliance and the ACC.

● Joanne Lucas has a Bachelors Degree in Psychology from the Universi-



Steve Estherby

ty of South Australia, and a Masters Degree in Theology from the JPPI Institute for Life, Marriage & Family. Since 2007 she has been the Education Officer for the Life, Marriage & Family Centre for the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney.

● Angela Shanahan has an Honours Degree in History and is well-known for her writings in the areas of the decline in fertility and social and family affairs. She has been a regular columnist with *The Australian* since 1994 and is a contributor to many other papers and journals such as *The Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The UK Spectator* and *Quadrant*.

The conference will be held at Camden Uniting Church, NSW 2-4 September 2010.

Registrations close: 28 August 2010 The complete brochure with travel details is available at www.confessingcongregations.com

ACC leader included in Canberra line-up

Dr Max Champion, National Chair of the ACC joined 200 other denominational, church and para-church leaders in Old Parliament House Canberra for "2010 make it count", organised by the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL). The nationally webcast event featured church leaders questioning the then PM Kevin Rudd and



Max Champion, top centre, projected on the wall of a local Church

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott.

Both support Parliament being opened each day with the Lord's Prayer, and continuing marriage as the union of a man and a woman.

Mr Abbott said that the current media classification system is "broken" in terms of its role in the premature sexualisation of children, and promised a review, "to ensure proper community standards apply to all media". Both Mr Rudd and Mr Abbott support school chaplains and Mr Abbott's committed to funding until 2014.

The Vic/Tas Moderator Isabel Thomas Dobson made it clear that the UCA chose to distance itself from the event in a recent issue of *Crosslight*, the synod's official paper. Responding to a letter to the editor she writes "The UCA is committed to being involved in ecumenical activities which respect and honour the distinctiveness of particular Christian traditions. Participation in such events as the webcast reduces the likely access of individual churches and the National Council of Churches Australia to political leaders because they think they have dealt with the churches through addressing the ACL and its events."

This difficulty does not seem to have occurred to the heads of churches who attended the Canberra event.



PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

True Believers

Why is it that those who are sceptical about God are praised while climate sceptics are vilified? Denying the existence of God is a guarantee of popularity among cultural elites. Climate-change deniers, however, are assured of becoming pariahs.

If it is a question of evidence then the fraudulent claim that faith, unlike science, is irrational needs to be debunked. Genuine faith in God is not a superstitious, immature or timid flight from the world of reason but a 'faith seeking understanding.'

Moreover, as faith is a response to the truth revealed in Christ, people of faith should be vitally interested in scientific truth.

Therefore, we should sift the evidence to test scientific claims. We should also have a healthy scepticism when claims about irrefutable evidence are accompanied by apocalyptic fervour about being "the greatest moral challenge of the twenty first century."

Inflated claims not only harm the scientific enterprise, they distract us from the task of affirming that our humanity has been redeemed in Christ. In a world where human dignity is abused surely this is our greatest challenge?

Atheism in politics

PM Julia Gillard's decision to take the oath of office without reference to God or the bible has caused quite a stir. Pastor Danny Nalliah decried her atheism, claiming that, unlike Tony Abbott, she is out to "destroy

our Judeo-Christian heritage." Bishop Robert Forsyth, though, is confident that she respects the beliefs of others (*The Sunday Age*, 18 July, p7). No doubt Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, sees her rise to the highest office as a timely sign of the decline of religious bigotry.

What are Christians to think? Is an atheist PM any more of a danger to civilization than politicians for whom the Christian faith is synonymous with fundamentalism or tolerance?

Perhaps, perhaps not! A friend once bought a car from a Christian used car salesman and wished he'd been an honest atheist.

Christians and Jews have lived under political systems which were variously religious, Christian and atheistic. Cyrus was hailed by prophets as an instrument of God's will. Paul urged the fledgling church to be good citizens and obey the Roman law. Millions have died at the hands of atheistic tyrants.

We should be as wary of Christian politicians as of atheists, particularly when their respective "faiths" are used to buttress their political ambitions. At the same time we should scrutinise what they say about freedom of religion, marriage, refugees, euthanasia, abortion, poverty and the environment.

Time will tell if the PM's atheism supports or opposes the rights and responsibilities which are grounded in our created and redeemed dignity as embodied in the humanity of Christ. It is heartening to see that she has joined former PM Kevin Rudd and opposition leader Tony Abbott in supporting marriage remaining between a man and a woman.

In the run up to the election and

beyond, Christians must learn to cast a discerning eye over the policies of all parties. It is no bad thing if the PM's atheism unsettles the faithful and forces a re-thinking of what it is to be a "Christian" in Australian political life today.

Pro Sex

"Sex: the Bible says go for it" was the front page heading in *The Age* (26/7). Reporting on a national conference on religion in the public square Barney Zwartz quoted Sydney sexologist Patricia Weerakoon that "Neuroscientific studies suggest that 'life-long heterosexual monogamy' is most likely to provide both sexual satisfaction and excitement."

Countering the accusation that religious people were necessarily "fearful, ignorant, defensive, repressed and hypocritical" about sex she said that "a biblical understanding of sex was deeply positive - 'do it, God made us for it' - while also being honest about human imperfections and limitations."

In what Melinda Tankard Reist describes as "a pornified world," this is a timely reminder of the place where the beauty of sex is best enjoyed. And it is a summons to withstand the pressure to demean sex and trash marriage and also to stand with brothers and sisters whose misguided sexual commitments have harmed them and others.

Left-wing bias?

Mark Aarons, son of communist strongman Laurie Aarons, has revealed that some former Labor party figures were also communists.

This explosive news has shocked Bob Carr, former Premier of NSW, but not surprised supporters of the much maligned Democratic Labor Party who aired these concerns from the 1950s.

The Aarons' expose would be of little more than historical interest if it were not for the silence of left wing commentators, long accustomed to berating right wing bigots for the ills of modern society.

It is not that they regard themselves as communists per se.

As Angela Shanahan notes, "Aarons' revelations might just seem interesting historical revisionism if it had not been for the eventual morphing of the communist cause into something far more subtle, more fluid and, because of its subtlety, more dangerous.

"Australia didn't succumb to political communism, but the Long March (through the institutions) is still going. Its focus is different: it is the most basic structure of society itself. It is the family." (*The Weekend Australian*, Inquirer July 10-11, p7)

In view of these disturbing revelations it would be refreshing if Uniting Church declarations on social justice, in addition to identifying flaws in right wing conservatism, were to uncover the flaws in left wing progressivism.

The failure of Assembly leaders to make a submission to a recent Senate inquiry on marriage and the absence of any mention of the family, abortion, euthanasia and freedom of religion in official statements on the state of the nation does not inspire confidence.

Stop the misery

"Stop the boats" is the ugly catchery of the major parties.

The plight of asylum seekers, as many have said, has been ignored by PM Gillard and Opposition Leader Abbott in their "race to the bottom" on "border protection" and "sustainable population."

There is scope for debate on how best to process applications for asylum, discourage people smugglers and plan for future growth. The misery of tens of millions of refugees around the globe cannot be ended by the policies of the Australian government. Responsibilities must be shared and shysters exposed.

Such considerations do not justify the portrayal of 'asylum seekers' en masse as "illegals" who threaten our security.

As the Uniting Church and others rightly say, they are fellow human

Leaders aim right to stop the boats that leak votes

Headline in thepunch.com.au

beings, the vast majority of whom have suffered unspeakable evil. Their plight should not be used to exploit ugly fears for political advantage. Christians must uphold their dignity in the public arena and insist that they be called what they are – displaced men, women and children seeking refuge.

The bland leading the bland

We share the UCA President's disappointment at the tone and quality of political debate in the election campaign.

He said "I'm hearing plenty of sound-bites but no real substance. Australians are looking to our politicians to display real leadership and talk honestly about their vision for our country.

"Instead we're seeing cheap political point-scoring that's not connected to any substantial vision for our future. ... Australians deserve better than to

be patronised by cheap promises and slogans designed to do nothing more than win votes.

"It is time to hear the deep aspirations and vision of the candidates and the parties that are asking for our votes. Now is the time for authentic leadership that offers genuine hope for a vibrant and flourishing future."

His concern is supported by Michelle Grattan (State of the Nation in *The Age*, 28/7, pp 4&5) who notes that "to survive and win, politicians must respond to public opinion.

This can make for bland leaders who seemingly stand for very little."

An unhealthy reliance on "consultation" and "consensus" discourages them from exercising firm leadership to the detriment of the public good.

The question for the electorate, the media and the churches is how far we have contributed to this blandness? Is it any wonder that our leaders shy away from controversy when, as the TV 'worm' shows, we are anxious about any statement that strays from the safe middle ground?

IAN CLARKSON

It's all good.

Years ago I was pastoring with a Melbourne outreach church primarily amongst the broken people of the so-called subcultural groups: addicts, bikers, the depressed and those with personality split-offs. By God's grace I had, though not knowing it at the time, been prepared for this by personally experiencing an awful period of depression, despair, hearing voices and understanding a little of what I think Paul referred to as being 'assaulted by lions'.

Two facts, Gospel facts, were eventually the means of my deliverance. Mercy and hope. As I ministered amongst these people a simple clear phrase formed in my mind all those years ago.

A phrase that frequently punctuated my conversations and became something like a mantra. It was

simply this 'it's all good'. I was convinced that by God's mercy, despair may be for a moment but not for a lifetime, and I wanted to hold out this same hope to others.

It wasn't a cliché then, as it isn't now and once when I said it in the presence of someone in a hard place they said, it's not always good. My reply was if it is not now, it will be.

Well it seems the phrase has gone around the world. It's all good. A friend of mine who was manager for an itinerant gospel singer spread it into Asia and the USA. and I noticed the other day Toohey's beer were using it and right now Domino's have it on their pizza boxes: it's all good, with a registered trade mark sign next to it, would you believe!

But the 'it' refers to everything for all time—and there is only One who can patent that!

CONFESSING MOVEMENT



Looks like the deep south: Christ Church Savannah

Kwong Yee Cheng

US Presbyterians accept gay ministers (maybe)

James Tillman LifeSiteNews.com
Meeting in Mid July, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to postpone a proposal that would have changed their definition of marriage to be a covenant between “two people” rather than between “a man and a woman.”

They also voted, however, to permit practising homosexuals to be ordained as ministers within PC(USA).

The assembly’s subordinate committee on civil union and marriage issues had voted 34-18 to change the definition of marriage. Cindy Bolbach, the moderator of the general assembly, said that the failure of the committee’s proposal in the wider assembly showed that delegates wished to discuss the subject further.

Bolbach personally supports same-sex “marriage” but has said she does not believe the denomination is ready to accept it yet. The proposal was postponed for two years, after which it will be considered again.

The gay-ordination proposal, which passed 373 to 323, must still be approved by a majority of the 173 local Presbyterian presbyteries or churches before it takes effect. This is the 4th time PC(USA) has approved the ordination of homosexual ministers; each of the previous times it has been rejected by local presbyteries.

PC(USA) has permitted the blessing of same-sex couples since 2000, and has endorsed civil unions for same-sex couples since 2004.

Carmen Fowler, president of the Presbyterian Lay Committee, said she believes such initiatives are to blame for the denomination’s falling membership.

The Presbyterian church has been rapidly shrinking for the last four decades. In 1965 it had about 4.25 million members; it now has about 2.1 million members.

To Bolbach’s contention that the church has become paralyzed, Fowler said that that is what happens when the church body is separated from its head: Jesus Christ.

Church of Wesley and Whitfield goes liberal

A church that lists both John Wesley and George Whitfield as former ministers is at the centre of one of the latest Anglican property court cases in the US.

Christ Church Savannah in Georgia looks just like a historic Southern US church should—a white temple with neoclassical columns. It will most likely be occupied by an Episcopal Church congregation again. An evangelical group aligned to the new Anglican Church in North America that has occupied the church for the last three years has lost its case in the Georgia Court of appeals.

The evangelical local churches that have broken from The Episcopal

Church seem to be losing most of the numerous property cases, which are based on state rather than national law. Pastor Robertson of the Anglican group told a local TV station, WTOG, the legal battle has nothing to do with the building itself, but the teachings of the gospel preached inside.

“It’s not about the beauty of the architecture, or the glory of the stained glass,” he said. “It has a lot more to do with the substance of the gospel and our call to be stewards, not only of the physical space, but of the message we’ve been given.”

Pastor Robertson’s group plan to appeal to the State Supreme Court.

Methodists’ patchy growth pattern

New stats released by the United Methodist church paint a picture of a church that is growing. Between 1998 and 2008 professing membership globally increased more than 14% or by more than 1.38 million.

In West Africa the church increased five times from 316,000 to 1,600,000. About half this was through a merger. In the Congo the increase was from 630,000

to 1,090,863. But in the USA and Europe the Church is in decline. In the US there has been a fall from 8,360,000 to 7,770,000 a fall of nearly 600,000

According to *The state of the Church* report in recent years, the rate of decline has grown steeper. Recent votes on issues like gay marriage show that the non US groups are far more conservative.

Abortion

in the Australian Community

An official Assembly of Confessing Congregations statement prepared by the ACC Social Responsibility Commission. In this *ACCatalyst* we present the official summary and key passages from the full text found at www.confessingcongregations.com

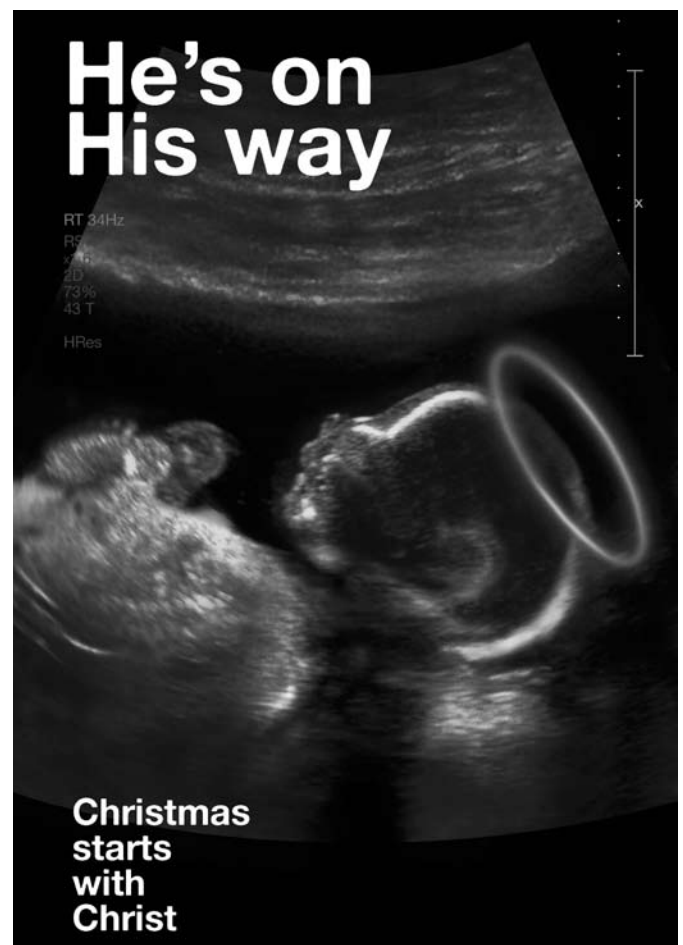
Abortion is a divisive issue in the Australian community and within the Christian Church. For those directly involved, in particular the pregnant woman, this inflamed atmosphere serves only to increase the suffering and distress of the situation.

The fetus¹ is genetically separate from the pregnant woman yet is undeniably 'of' her, and the onus of responsibility for its development is primarily the woman's. The ACC believes that human life in the image of God begins at conception, and affirms the intrinsic moral value of that life from the point in the biblical witness of humankind's creation as male and female in the image of God.

1. Summary

The full form of this statement can be found at www.confessingcongregations.com. It discusses the situation and laws regarding abortion in Australia and appropriate attitudes and actions, including (a fuller version of) these affirmations:

- Christians understand all humans to be made in the image of God, who is both the origin and destiny of all human life. We affirm the sacred and intrinsic value of all human life from conception.
- Christian attention must always be directed to the vulnerable, the suffering and the weakest members of the human family. This includes the fetus and a mother who is under serious stress.
- When we consider the morality of abortion, we note the responsibility of each Christian to form or inform their conscience and determine their actions in the light of the teaching of God's Word.
- The sacredness of human life requires a 'principle of presumption for life', i.e. that wherever possible the life of the unborn child ought not be taken. Nonetheless this pre-



This year's Christmas poster for ChurchAds.net in the UK will make a powerful point about unborn children.

sumption may be challenged in the most serious situations as when the life of the mother is seriously endangered.

- We strongly resist the idea of abortion being considered a morally appropriate 'lifestyle choice'. Nor should it be

regarded as an alternative to contraception.

● For some people, in certain contexts, giving birth and parenthood may appear impossibly difficult.

● Life for the unborn child is always to be sought but we resist laws which prohibit all abortion. Yet the law has an important role in regulating abortion. Hence we resist

(a) the changing medical definition (to include later babies in utero);

(b) the more and more liberal interpretations of existing law; and
(c) changes to abortion laws which have the effect of leading towards abortion on request at any stage of pregnancy.

● We recognise the community's responsibility for attitudes and behaviours which influence the context of many pregnancies and hence its responsibility to care for all those involved. It is important that Christians offer pastoral care and support.

● We affirm the need for the Church to exercise a healing ministry for those who suffer the consequences of abortion and for a ministry of education in homes, schools, churches and health centres about sexual relationships, marriage, family planning and parenting.

There is one surgical abortion for every 2.8 births in Australia.

The Situation in Australia

Some statistics are a cause for concern.

1. In Australia "termination of pregnancy is estimated to be the outcome of around 1 in 4 pregnancies. Around 1 in 3 women will have an abortion in their lifetime."²

2. An estimated 90,000 surgical abortions per year are performed in Australia. This does not include chemically induced abortions or abortions that are privately funded. There is one surgical abortion for every 2.8 births in Australia.

3. The Pregnancy Advisory Service of the Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne conducted an audit of 3,827 calls by pregnant women over the 12 months 1/10/06 to 30/9/07³: 90% of women requested an abortion; 9% were ambivalent or undecided.

● 54% sought abortion because the pregnancy came "at the wrong time".

● 18% requested an abortion because they already "had enough children".

● 39% had already had termination of a previous pregnancy.

The medical definition of abortion in Australia has recently been modified. For many years an abortion was defined as "expulsion or removal of an embryo or fetus from the uterus at the stage of pregnancy when it is incapable of independent survival" (i.e. at any time between conception and the 24th week of pregnancy).⁴

After this time it was called "termination of pregnancy" rather than "abortion". (Also a distinction was recognised between "abortion", a procedure deliberately carried out to end the pregnancy, and a "miscarriage" as an accidental or spontaneous occurrence.) However, now the use of the word "abortion" has been changed and is not limited to a pregnancy before the fetus is viable. "Abortion" and "termination of pregnancy" are used interchangeably to refer to ending a pregnancy at any stage (as in point 1 above).⁵

The effect of this change in terminology is to extend the widespread acceptance of 'abortion' by many in the

community to premature babies capable of being born and surviving.

Also, calling late termination "abortion" brings it into line with the legal definition, i.e. "By 'abortion' we mean an intentional termination of pregnancy by the act of any person by any means".⁶ It has been said that "one way to soften resistance to the unacceptable is to confuse it with the acceptable".⁷

The Law Regarding Abortion

Abortion law in Australia is under the jurisdiction of the various states and territories and although there was previously a general similarity the Australian Capital Territory (in 2002) and Victoria (in 2008) removed abortion from the criminal code and moved to a substantially different position. Previously in Victoria, abortion practice was largely based on the 1969 Menhennitt ruling of the Supreme Court (with the similar Levine ruling in New South Wales and with similar practices in Queensland and Tasmania) which said that abortion was legal if it was necessary to preserve the physical or mental health of the mother. Abortion for fetal abnormalities was permitted on the grounds that the birth of an abnormal baby was likely to cause stress to the mother. Subsequently this judgement was liberally interpreted so that abortion for any degree of maternal stress became legitimate and effectively allowed abortion on demand.

In October 2008 the Victorian Parliament passed the Abortion Law Reform Act which totally decriminalised abortion and which changed the definition of abortion to include those over 24 weeks gestation.

Consequently, abortion can be performed on request up to 24 weeks gestation and after 24 weeks with the consent of two doctors and the reasons can include "social circumstances".

Legislation in one state or territory is frequently followed by pressure for similar laws in others. Many Christians and other people have deep concerns that more liberal interpretations of the law, that have the effect of leading towards abortion on request at any stage of pregnancy, may be proposed in other states. It would be prudent to study what happened in Victoria in an attempt to prevent it being repeated in other jurisdictions.

The Victorian law has another area of concern in that doctors who hold a conscientious objection to abortion must refer a patient to another practitioner who does not hold such an objection. Whilst Parliament allowed its members a "conscience vote" on the legislation, the Act does not allow doctors and nurses to practise according to their conscience if they have a conscientious objection to abortion. Some believe that referring to another doctor for the purposes of an abortion is tantamount to performing an abortion themselves.

¹The term "fetus" will be used and taken to include "embryo" to avoid the possible confusion that a change in that terminology implies, as some people suggest, a change in moral status.

²Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG). Termination of pregnancy. A resource for health professionals. Nov. 2005 p 2.

³Rowe H G, Kirkman M, Hardeman EA, Mallett S and Rosenthal D (2009) Considering Abortion: a 12 months audit of records of women contacting a Pregnancy Advisory Service. MJA, 190 (2) p 69ff.

⁴Oxford Concise Medical Dictionary 5th edition 1998. Our italics.

⁵The RANZCOG defines termination of pregnancy "deliberately ending a pregnancy so it does not progress to birth". The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG). Termination of pregnancy. A resource for health professionals. Nov. 2005 p 7.

⁶Law Reform Commission. Law of Abortion. Final report. p 17, marginal note.

⁷McCormick R, The Christian Century No 108 (1991): 1134.

Engaging the basis

Walter Abetz reports from the UCA Basis of Union conference Melbourne 9th-11th July, 2010

The conference was mooted initially as a meeting of theological faculty staff from around Australia, but it was opened out to ministers and leaders in the church. The paragraphs of the Basis of Union which were the focus of the conference were paragraphs three, nine and eleven. Paragraph three was seen as the core, a statement of the core belief of the church as church, and the allegiance of the church to her Lord, the crucified risen Christ.

The foci of the conference were

- the theological responsibility of the Uniting Church
- the theological commitments of the Basis of Union
- establishing a context in which theological discussion between scholars, teachers and leaders can develop
- stimulate serious theological reflection in the wider Uniting Church about the role of theology in the church's worship, witness and service
- elucidate some key phrases of the Basis of Union.

The presenters and conferees fulfilled these aims magnificently.

The theological responsibility of the church is to proclaim Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, in fresh words and deeds that engage with our society. Paragraph three, nine and eleven were entirely appropriate for this kind of analysis. Jesus Christ is the Lord of the church, and it was asserted that paragraph eleven must be read in the light of paragraphs three and nine.

The theological commitment of the Basis of Union is to proclaim the risen crucified Lord, in the context of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. The focus of the writers of the Basis was on locating the Uniting Church within the world-wide church, rather than establishing a particularly Australian church. This raises some questions about the wisdom of the new preamble. The commitment of the Basis is to proclaim the one Lord Jesus Christ, within the parameters set by Scripture and Creeds, noting that the creeds must be read in the context of Scripture, not as stand-alone documents.

The post-modern slogan, "Well, that's just your perspective" was carefully critiqued by Rev Dr Geoff Thomson, and dismissed as incompatible with the Basis of Union. There are boundaries which must be respected, if the Uniting Church is to remain within the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

Dr Ben Myers' colourful analysis of the need to proclaim Jesus Christ in fresh words and deeds reminded us that we need to have no fear about the influences of post modernity, as long as we were able to recognise it and

avoid it ourselves. The graphic hypothetical illustration of Ben going into a brothel, and then bemoaning the fact that brothels endanger his marriage, was greeted with much laughter. It made the point. We can always play the role of victim out of intellectual laziness. Alex Jensen's paper pursued this matter at some depth — we need to understand developments in academia so we know how the proclamation needs to be phrased in order to address those who oppose Christ's Lordship.

I am encouraged by the start which a self-selected group of Uniting Church members have made, in working towards renewal of the Uniting Church's self-understanding.

Other ACCers: Rosalie Hudson

Rev Professor Norman Young set the tone by emphasizing the UCA came into being not as a human work (ecclesiastical carpentry); rather as expressing God's gift already at work in the unity of the Father and the Son. The four questions confronting the church:

1. Is our message unequivocally centred on Jesus Christ?
2. Have we sought the aid of our confessing forbears?
3. Are those who cherish the past ready to confess anew Jesus Christ?
4. Are we facing the world or just facing one another?

Ben Myers asked 'What does it mean for the church to address the risen Christ?' This question is pivotal for the church's focus on scholarship as well as in its discussion of legal matters. Para 11 of the Basis is an unfolding of the implications of the resurrection. An informed faith remains 'poised and attentive to Christ, to steel the church to faithfulness'.

Bishop Steve Pickard as one of the 'ecumenical listeners' focused on the constant tension regarding the givenness of the gospel and the need for innovation. Regarding the former he drew attention to the beautiful language in the Epistle of Jude: "contending for the gospel". He finds as an Anglican bishop that "many churches prefer the pain of dying to the cost of living".

Ian Breward

I felt that it was good to have such a conference and that useful perspectives were offered on multiculturalism and relativism, as well as the issue of christology.

Nevertheless, I think there were issues which were not dealt with, which should have been. Does the Basis have continuing theological authority, because it is a confessional document? What does it teach us about theological method and accountability to uphold the substance of the faith? How do we deal with the gaps which the Basis does not deal with because of the theological and social changes of the last 50 years? How does the UCA deal with those who significantly depart from the Basis? How do we deal with changes in hermeneutics?

Dear Alistair/ Dear Max

Letters exchanged between the chair of ACC, Dr Max Champion and UCA National Assembly President Alistair Macrae tell the story of delicate discussions about a same sex blessing.

9 June, 2010

Dear Alistair*

I write on behalf of the National Council of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia (ACC) to express our deep concern about a 'special event' at the forthcoming 'Daring to Join' conference in Melbourne.

The publicity on the Uniting Network Australia (UNA) website indicates that a "Sacred Union Ceremony" will be held on Saturday 12 June at 4pm at Brunswick Uniting Church.

According to an article in the Sydney Star Observer on 4 June this ceremony is part of a political campaign to normalize gay marriage within the Uniting Church (UCA).

The Rev Leanne Jenski is quoted as saying: "We hope to make our relationship legal in marriage one day, like other couples who've been together for a long time and have a right to get married."

The Rev Dr Robert Stringer, co-chair of UNA, is reported to have said that "the church had ignored gay and lesbian couples 'too long'" and that "it was hypocritical to accept gay and lesbian ministers but not recognize or celebrate their relationships." "Gay and lesbian couples demonstrate the same love and commitment as straight couples," he said, and "The Uniting Church needs to reconsider its entire understanding of committed relationships and marriage."

The participants hope that the liturgy devised by the UNA for the 'Sacred Union Ceremony' will be included in the official liturgies of the UCA. To this end 'a booklet including the liturgy for Sacred Union ceremonies will be launched during the conference' and a copy handed to you 'the day after the blessing so the church can consider using it officially.'

The UCA's strong affirmation of marriage as 'the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life' (1997 Assembly) excludes the possibility of celebrating a union between people of the same sex. The Doc.byte on

* *These letters have been slightly edited for length.*

'Marriage' produced by the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine (2008) upholds the 1997 statement and the Declaration of Purpose in the UCA Marriage Service. Any departure from this understanding of the covenantal or sacramental nature of marriage would separate the UCA from the classical theological tradition grounded in loyalty to Christ as attested in Scripture.

It would further jeopardize our relationships with other churches, specifically calling into question on-going dialogue with the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox Churches. [*Max gives background of dialogue between the churches*].

It would be most unfortunate if the UCA were to lose sight of what the Rev Dr Robert Johnson, then General Secretary of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, said in *The Age* (2 August 2003) after the 2003 Assembly. In relation to "gay marriage" "it should also be noted that the Uniting Church does not and has not endorsed gay marriage. We have stated that marriage is a sacred union between and man and a woman, alone.'

It is therefore most unfortunate that, when UCA leaders insist that the decisions of the 2003 and 2006 Assemblies have not changed our understanding of marriage, you will be attending a conference at which a 'sacred union ceremony' will have been held to affirm same-sex partnerships in a way that mimics marriage between a man and a woman and, according to key figures in the UNA, opens the way to the UCA's acceptance of 'same-sex marriage.'

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that holding this ceremony, at which ministers are being encouraged to robe, is a blatant political act by the UNA designed to gather support beyond the UCA and to apply pressure for the acceptance of 'same-sex marriage' within the UCA. Unfortunately, your presence at the conference, as President, gives the 'special event' an authority it would not otherwise warrant. It conveys to the rest of the UCA, and our ecumenical partners both here and overseas, as well as the wider public, your tacit approval of the ceremony and your willingness to contemplate a dramatic shift in the church's understanding of marriage.

If due process is to be followed by the UNA, then its suggestions to alter or expand UCA liturgies should be

forwarded to the Assembly Working Groups on Doctrine and Liturgy before being considered for public worship. In this case, the process has been subverted in what looks like an attempt to gain political advantage, and reverse the onus of proof, over those who uphold the church's fine teaching on marriage between a man and a woman.

If the UCA is to change its understanding of 'sacred union' to include same-sex relationships, then it must be done after a thorough examination of the theology of marriage – a task on which the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine has already started.

As President, it is your responsibility to ensure that radical changes to the church's ethics and liturgy are not adopted in practice before this vital work is complete. One of your primary duties as President is to be the public representative of the UCA (Regulation 3.6.13). That means representing in public the decisions of Assemblies. If you agree to receive this liturgy after it has been used, thereby implicitly encouraging the use of the 'sacred union ceremony,' you will not be representing the decisions of Assemblies as they currently stand.

In view of the seriousness of the issues raised by the 'Sacred Union Ceremony' I urge you, as President, to counsel the organizers of the conference to cancel the 'special event', to advise the media accordingly, and to request the UNA to discuss the proposed liturgy with the relevant Assembly working groups before any future ceremonies are held.

It is not helpful to Uniting Church members or for our relationship to sister churches for you, as President, to be seen to be siding with one group on this fundamental and sensitive issue. If you agree to receive the liturgy after it has been used, thereby publicly implying that you do not disapprove of the 'Sacred Union Ceremony,' it would be construed that you have allowed the church's official position on marriage to be distorted or weakened by a pressure group within the church.

In order to avoid the impression that you, as President, are encouraging division within the UCA and among major representatives of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic church, I urge you most strongly not to attend the conference and to counsel the participants to desist from what would be an extremely divisive action.

Failure to do so will disappoint a great many UCA members and confirm the impression that, while no offence is to be caused to proponents of same-sex unions, the same does not apply to those who uphold the ecumenical faith on marriage. Although your presence will be welcomed by those who are intent on re-defining marriage, in clear breach of the unified witness of Scripture, as affirmed in the Basis of Union, it will dismay evangelical, reformed and orthodox members of the UCA and our ecumenical partners, thereby gravely weakening the already shaky reputation of the UCA as a genuinely confessing church.

With regards,
 Rev Dr Max Champion
 National Chair, ACC



10 June, 2010 by email

Dear Max,

Thank you for your letter of Thursday June 10. It is important that I reply promptly to your letter but I need to be brief. I am about to travel interstate then to the USA so I'm pressed for time.

My main concern is that you interpret my attendance for Eucharist and dinner on the final evening of the Uniting Network conference as endorsement of the 'sacred union' ceremony planned for the day before.

This is not true at any level.

To my knowledge Presidents always receive invitations to attend this Conference which I believe takes place every two years. Presidents attend in a pastoral capacity as they do at many gatherings of Uniting Church people.

I accepted the invitation to attend part of the Conference before I knew anything about the proposed ceremony. When it became clear that the ceremony had been programmed to take place on the Sunday night, the only time I could be there, I indicated that I could not be in attendance at such an event precisely because it might be interpreted as a tacit endorsement of the ceremony. Accordingly they reorganized the program and moved the ceremony to the Saturday evening.

I understand that I will be presented with a copy of the liturgy they used. Again, there is no way this can be interpreted as endorsement of the ceremony. I am given all manner of things when I attend various functions and this will be no different. I will certainly read the liturgy with interest to help me understand what they have done.

If there is an expectation that I then present it to the

Assembly Standing Committee for approval I will, of course, advise them about the processes by which members of the Uniting Church can bring proposals before the Church for consideration. Using the President as a courier is not one of them!

The President's role in such situations is to faithfully convey the teachings of the Church. With regard to your concerns about marriage, as you indicate, the Uniting Church's understanding is clear and unequivocal. The matter is certainly not before the Assembly Standing Committee and there is no intention to generate debate on this matter.

I hope this gives you some level of reassurance Max. Please do what you can within your own networks to dispel any unhelpful misinformation about these matters.

Yours sincerely, in Christ,

Alistair (Rev Alistair Macrae, President National Assembly Uniting Church in Australia)

11 June, 2010

Dear Alistair,

Thank you for your prompt reply of 10 June.

Naturally, I am aware that the President attends many church functions in a pastoral capacity and is handed all manner of material. My letter also assumes that you would not be attending the 'ceremony' itself. These considerations are not at the heart of the letter.

The facts are these:

- A 'Sacred Union Ceremony' has been publicly advertised as part of a conference which is taking place under the auspices of the Uniting Church in Australia.
- Prominent leaders of Uniting Network Australia have publicly stated that they intend to press for the 'right' of same-sex couples to marriage in the UCA.

Therefore, the 'ceremony' must be viewed as a political attempt to change the church's doctrine of marriage.

As President your pastoral responsibility is not primarily to listen to what all groups within the church are saying – as important as that is. You are called under God to clearly uphold the doctrine of the church and to warn individuals and groups about beliefs, practices and services which seriously endanger the unity of the church.

We therefore believe that, for the sake of the unity of the church, it is necessary for you to use this occasion to publicly state [*Max makes similar demands to the next letter....*] Be assured, Alistair, that we have no interest in 'unhelpful misinformation.' A copy of your letter will be circulated to our extensive network of supporters and friends together with UNA publicity and this reply.

With regards, Rev Dr Max Champion

20 June, 2010

Dear Alistair,

Thank you for your readiness to respond more fully to our concerns in due course.

Nevertheless, we are disappointed that, despite our misgivings, and those of many other members of the UCA, the 'sacred union ceremony' went ahead and that there has not been a timely statement from you setting out the Uniting Church's position on the matter.

The conduct of the service only heightened our concerns. We welcome the fact that you had warned min-

isters in same-sex relationships that participation in a service to bless their relationships could result in disciplinary action by the Church. But it is regrettable that the liturgist, the preacher and the minister of the church were not similarly warned – or chose not to heed it.

The initial question asked of the couples clearly paralleled the question asked of a man and a woman in the marriage service, namely, 'will you love him/her, comfort him/her, honour and protect, etc.'

The couples signed a register, which, it was announced, would be included in the marriage register of the Brunswick church. Witnesses came forward to sign a certificate for each of the couples which clearly paralleled a marriage certificate and was held high, to the applause of the congregation.

A three tiered wedding cake was on display at the front of the church which had a female couple on one side and a male couple on the other.

In the interests of the unity of the Church I urge you to circulate a public statement to UCA members, our ecumenical partners and the secular media which:

1. Outlines the background to the controversy and the conduct of the service (as indicated above).
2. Re-affirms the UCA's commitment to the unique dignity of marriage between a man and a woman alone.
3. Acknowledges that the Assembly has not determined a theological basis for changing the UCA's commitment to marriage or establishing a 'sacred union ceremony' for same-sex couples.
4. Repudiates the decision of Uniting Network Australia to conduct a 'sacred union ceremony' at the 'Dare to Join' conference.
5. Indicates that the national committee of UNA, the minister of the Brunswick Church, the liturgist, the preacher and the ministers who took part in the liturgical procession have been asked to account for their actions under the Code of Ethics.

In view of the mantra of UCA leaders since the 2003 Assembly that nothing has changed in our understanding of the relationship between the sexes and that, were it to change, sound doctrinal reasons would have to be approved by Assembly, we urge you to repudiate the holding of the 'sacred union ceremony.'

With regards,

Rev Dr Max Champion

20 July, 2010

Dear Alistair,

On 21 June, before leaving for the inaugural meeting of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, you promised to make a fuller response to the concerns of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations over the holding of a 'sacred union ceremony' at the Uniting Network Australia conference on 12 June.

What was said on that occasion, and in a subsequent article in the *Sydney Star Observer* on 24 June, makes it absolutely clear that the ultimate goal of the Uniting Network is the acceptance of same-sex 'marriage' in the Uniting Church in Australia.

Therefore, unfortunately, no useful purpose can be served by holding joint conversations.

As it is more than two weeks since you returned from abroad, and more than five weeks since the 'ceremony' took place, it is incumbent on you, as President, to respond fully to the issues raised as a matter of urgency.

It is clear that you and other Assembly leaders, at short

notice, can respond very quickly to many statements which are made by politicians. Thus, your silence on a matter which goes to the heart of the faith and practice of the Uniting Church as a truly ecumenical church gives the unfortunate impression that, in comparison to other issues, the future of marriage is relatively unimportant.

I look forward to your reply in the very near future. I know that ACC members, other members of the UCA, and our ecumenical partners will be interested in what you have to say, particularly as the issue will be highlighted in the August issue of ACCatalyst.

With regards,
Rev Dr Max Champion

20 July, 2010

Dear Max,

I write in response to your letter to me of 20 June 2010.

Let me first express my regret that you disregarded my request to delay circulating your letter of June 20 in relation to the 'sacred union ceremony' until you were in possession of the full picture. I indicated that there were some errors of fact and some inaccurate suppositions in that letter.

I regret too that your letter failed to refer to my offer to convene a meeting between you and leaders of Uniting Network in order to more fully understand their intentions and the facts of what occurred. This is what I meant when I urged you to follow "biblical counsel about resolving disputes within the Church". I was

referring to Jesus' advice that if one follower has a dispute with another they should go and see that person face to face before pursuing other processes (Matthew 18: 15). Instead you chose a path that appears inflammatory and divisive.

To reiterate the history of this matter:

Uniting Network invited me to attend their biennial Conference in Melbourne. I had already committed to attending the Tongan National Conference in Sydney so I indicated that I would attend on Sunday evening. Uniting Network then reported that they planned to hold a 'sacred union ceremony' on that Sunday evening.

When I learnt about the nature of the ceremony I said that I could not be present for such a ceremony as some members of the Church might interpret my attendance as an endorsement of the ceremony.

Accordingly, they changed their program and shifted the ceremony to the Saturday afternoon. I indicated that I would be happy to attend their Conference for the final dinner and Eucharist.

As I pointed out to you, past Presidents have been

invited to attend the Uniting Network Conference and have done so in a pastoral capacity, as we do at many gatherings of Church people.

Uniting Network also indicated that they would present me with a copy of the liturgy at the dinner which they did. Again, no endorsement of the liturgy was implied.

Leading up to the weekend I met and had phone discussions with the minister who preached at the ceremony. I reminded him of the Assembly policy relating to pastoral responses to same sex relationships, namely, that any responses should not resemble a marriage ceremony, I was assured that in the conduct of the ceremony it would be made explicitly clear that the ceremony was 'not a marriage ceremony'. It will be a matter of personal judgment as to whether the ceremony resembled a marriage ceremony. As you indicate there appear to have been some elements in common; but in very obvious ways, by any church definition, it was clearly not a marriage service and did not pretend to be.

The President's role in such situations is to faithfully convey the teachings of the Church and this is what I did. With regard to marriage, the Uniting Church's teaching is clear and unequivocal. The latest authoritative statement was affirmed at the 1997 Assembly and this definition is now reflected in the Uniting Church Marriage Service.

To quote from that Assembly resolution: "Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life. It is intended to be the mutually faithful lifelong union of a woman and man expressed in every part of their life together. In marriage the man and the woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship."

The Assembly Standing Committee has received no indication from Uniting Network that it intends to change this understanding. ...

In my experience "Uniting Network" like the Assembly of Confessing Christians, is committed to transparency. As I understand it they are looking for ways to encourage gay and lesbian members of our Church to live in ways that reflect gospel values of love and fidelity.

In your letter you mention an implied "equivalence" of same-sex unions and marriage. I am not sure what you mean by this. Clearly Uniting Network would like official recognition by the Church of the legitimacy of same-sex covenantal unions. My advice to them is that if they want clarity in this matter they should consider the usual church processes for introducing it through the Councils of the Church for discussion, discernment and debate. You may remember that last time this was on the Assembly's agenda (1997) the debate was closed before this particular matter was discussed.

Your request that I ask participants to account for their actions. If there are concerns in the church about whether a Minister has adhered to the Code of Ethics the steps are clear about how that matter is raised and determined. It is not appropriate for the President to participate in that process as there always remains the possibility that the process might be subject to a request for a Presidential Ruling, or may require a pastoral intervention arising from the issue's consideration by the President.

Please circulate this response to the people to whom you sent your letter of June 20, 2010.

Yours sincerely in Jesus Christ,
Rev Alistair Macrae



A call to Repentance

Several ACCers emailed this election comment to *ACCatalyst*. Finally we tracked down the author Dr DAVID LOGAN Pastor of Armidale Community Church who has been amazed at how his email has taken off.

I guess that we've all formed our opinions about the bloodless coup that took place in Canberra recently and maybe some sort of statement has already been made in your church about the events that took place and their consequences. I do believe that these events may be more historic than the media commentators realise—but for different reasons from those that they espoused in their journalistic analysis.

Whether you considered Kevin Rudd to be the best thing since sliced bread or the worst thing since Adolf Hitler, he was our Prime Minister and WAS elected by the Australian public into that role. It is technically true that we elect local members who then elect their own leader and the leader of the majority party becomes PM, however it is indisputable that the last election was a Presidential style election and we were told that a vote for a Labor candidate was a vote for Rudd and a vote for a Liberal candidate was a vote for Howard. Rudd's face appeared on ALL local promo material. It WAS the expectation of those who voted Labor into government that Rudd would be PM. It was indisputably the understanding of the Australian people that they had elected Kevin Rudd to lead our Nation as Prime Minister.

The ALP is a factionalised party—i.e. the factions, not the rank and file, run the party. Rudd was not a member of a faction (a rare thing in itself), however, because neither the Right nor Left factions could get their candidate “up” in the party room, the popular Kevin Rudd was seen as the compromise candidate who could win the election. It worked. But when the popularity faded and the polls went down, Rudd had no factional power base to protect him and thus the unknown back room ALP

factional power brokers rose against him. The Prime Minister of this nation was sacked at the behest of these people—the MP's of course, had to take their instructions from these people, after all it is these factional leaders who determine MP's pre-selection! Those who remember the ALP's outrage at the sacking of Gough Whitlam have every right to see Rudd's sacking by that same ALP machine as hypocritical.

Don't be fooled, despite the Gillard appointment, we still have a very unstable and potentially volatile situation. Julia Gillard is a member of the Left faction, yet she has come to power due to the support afforded to her by the Right and Centre-Right factions. If she loses popularity or upsets the Right, she could easily face the same fate as Rudd; for if they withdraw their support for her, she will fall as did Rudd. She must govern to please the Right and Centre Right and yet maintain her left credibility. By the way, the ALP Right are the ones who control the ALP in NSW, and that should be enough to frighten anyone!

Love or loathe Rudd, he had strong morals and a Christian base. The new PM lacks credibility in both of these areas.

Some say that it is good to have Gillard because she is a female—our first female PM. But is gender really important? Has the gender of the Premier in NSW or Qld suddenly made their respective governments better? Of course not. Gender is really irrelevant, it's character that matters.

Rudd was replaced by the first PM to be living in a de facto relationship, so her views on marriage and family don't need to be canvassed; her lifestyle speaks to those issues. She is one who declares herself to be non religious. Gillard opposed the ongoing funding of school chaplains as Education Minister but bowed to Rudd's wish to provide funding for another round. That funding will now be at serious risk. Gillard is on record as one who supports the right of same sex couples to marry

Love or loathe Rudd, he had strong morals and a Christian base.

or, at the very least, have another “form of committed adult relationship” that would be registered and recognised and grant defacto couples and same sex couples the same legal status as married couples. Rudd blocked the ACT Government’s attempt to legitimise Gay marriage. It is highly unlikely that Gillard will follow suit. I expect to see the ACT Labor government re-introduce this legislation and be able to proceed without the objection of the Federal Government. Of course, this would be the thin edge of the wedge—once one jurisdiction starts others will follow. Gillard is on record as a supporter of abortion on demand funded by Medicare. This list could go on.

Is she a woman of principle? It is hard to see the one who strongly supported decisions of the Rudd Government but is now backing a different horse on these issues, as being a person of principle (remember, she was deputy PM, she was involved in the making of all of the decisions on things such as the mining tax, the carbon trading scheme, the population target, the school hall scheme, border protection etc).

So what about the Opposition, are they the answer? Certainly the Opposition Leader has a strong moral and religious base, but his party is in disarray, filled with infighting and instability. Remember, they have had three changes of leader to Labor’s two! Don’t be fooled, politically, our nation is in a mess.

In NSW we have a government that has seen over 200 ministerial changes in less than a single 4 year term and that spells instability. It has been rocked by in-fighting, ministerial resignations and sackings because of unlawful conduct.... at least one former minister is now in gaol. And be reminded again, NSW is “run” by the same factional power base that has elevated Gillard to the PM’s job.

Are the so-called “Christian” parties the answer? I can’t support the so called Christian parties in NSW whose only parliamentary representatives conducted a spiteful, vilifying, unchristian “slanging match” in the media, accusing each other of immoral and unlawful conduct.

It is more than disappointing to see the Brisbane *Courier Mail* report (June 23, 2010) that “Mr Nile introduced his private member’s bill, seeking to ban the wearing of the burqa and other face veils in public, shortly after 8pm (AEST) yesterday. Greens MP John Kaye said only the four Greens MPs and Family First MP Gordon Moyes voted against introducing (ie discussing) the bill yesterday.”

The Bill, by the way, was based on the Belgium bill and was reported to be in response to a robbery in Sydney where the robber was wearing a full face-covering burqa! The French parliament has just passed a similar bill by over 300 votes to 1.

What I am saying is simple. Encouraging Christians in our Nation to vote for one party over another is not the answer. We’ve gone beyond that. Our Nation is in very deep trouble.

Islam is gaining a strong foothold—you may have read recently of a policeman who was charged with racial

abuse over his demand that a Moslem woman uncover her face so he could check her license. The influence of Islam is growing at an extremely rapid rate.

Spiritually, morally, politically our nation is heading downhill at a rate of knots. What I am saying is that if the church doesn’t wake up and pray and step into the void and do so very quickly, our children will live in a very different Australia to the one we know today. This is a message that we must heed and that needs to be taken to the church across our nation.

Think about this. Julia Gillard’s grandparents were part of the Welsh revival, her parents were raised in a God-fearing Baptist home, she had a little exposure to the gospel in a Baptist environment in her childhood. She now says that she is a “non religious person” a “non practicing Baptist” (whatever that is!). It has only taken one generation to lose the effect of the Welsh revival, to lose Biblical morals and principles. Just one generation.

I realize that the picture that I have painted is negative but the picture is accurate; that really IS the way that the world is, that really IS the state of our Nation.

But there is another perspective. If it only takes one generation to kill a revival, then understand this, one generation is all it takes to restore the same! We can hold our heads in despair as we view this South Land of The Holy Spirit or we can lift our heads and become that generation that makes this South Land GREAT.

Yes, politically, morally and religiously, our Nation is in deep trouble. But I believe that God has given us the answer. “If my people who are called by my name.....”. The answer is not in our ballot boxes, although we must be wise and prayerful about who we will vote for.

The church must rise up, the sleeping giant must wake. We MUST pray and we must declare the counsel of God without fear or favour. We must take a stand on morality and godly principles. We must be the generation who restores the revival, the generation that rises up in Jesus’ name and will not bow down to any other name. It may not be the popular path, but I believe it is Australia’s last hope.

We simply MUST be part of THAT generation the generation that rises up and reclaims our heritage. To leave it to another generation will be to leave it too late. To leave it to another people will be to make a tragic mistake.

If not me then who? If not now then when? If not, then why not? It only takes one generation and it has to be ours!

Dr Dan added in a comment to ACCatalyst: I should note one thing, lest it be misunderstood. I am NOT saying that Christians shouldn’t be politically active - quite to the contrary, we should be vocal in our opposition to that which undermines the values and freedoms that we hold so dearly.

There is simply no point in us being the salt of the earth if we keep ourselves bunkered down in the salt shaker, there is no point being the light if we hide under covers that prevent the light from being seen.

The gay lobby and the Islamic lobby have given their constituents far more influence than their relative numbers in our nation would warrant—Christians should reclaim their lost ground and their lost voice in our nation and this would mean some political lobbying etc. However we will lose this battle if we fail to first pray and fail to “seek The Lord while He may be found”.

**If not me
then who?
If not now
then when?
If not, then
why not?**

LOCAL CHURCH

Lay ministry in Grenfell

Working together is the key to ministry in this country community, reports Elder GEORGE WALKER.

Our small town, Grenfell, on the south west slopes of NSW had its beginnings, like many other country towns, with the discovery of gold, which took place here in September, 1866.

By four months later 10,000 people had arrived. Within one month of the opening of the goldfields, Rev. Butler, a Wesleyan minister from Bathurst, was preaching on the field and within two months lay people led by Mr. H. Burrell, a chemist, had commenced a Wesleyan Sunday School. An issue of "Mining Record" dated June 20, 1867, included the following:

"The Wesleyan SS thanks all who responded with a supply of books for the Sunday School library.—signed H. Burrell, Supt., J. McGrath Sec."

In February 1867, the Primitive Methodists erected a small iron building at a cost of \$150 and started a Sunday School. On November 3rd, 1867, the Wesleyans opened their first church built of pine slabs and shingle roof and it was filled almost every night of the week. Until 1892 Grenfell was part of the Young Circuit and the Grenfell Circuit was constituted in that year. From then till 1990, our Methodist then Uniting Churches were supplied with an ordained minister continually. At all times with numerous services being held in outlying centres, Lay Preachers (Local Preachers under Methodist terminology) played a vital part in ministry. Sunday Schools also thrived up till fairly recent times. The population of Grenfell has remained pretty static at around 2000 people for many years but with the continuing poor seasons, the number of people on district farms has been much reduced with properties becoming larger and



Grenfell Uniting

farmers' sons finding better paid jobs elsewhere. Also we have one of the oldest populations in NSW.

During the last 20 years the vacancies between having settled ordained ministers has progressively lengthened until today it is three and a half years since Rev. Charles Vesley (former RA Executive member) moved on to military chaplaincy. During the periods when we have been without a settled minister, we have been blessed with short term ministries from three weeks up to two months and these have been much appreciated. Among these has been an English Methodist minister on Sabbatical leave, Rev. Eric Pritchard, for 2 months in 1991. Others have been Rev. Neville Threlfall, Rev. Rod James, Rev. Graham Checkley and Rev. Ron Loom. This year we have been inspired by Sunday services from Rev. Bronwen Murphy, Rev. Lew Born, Rev. Clive Pearson and Rev. Bruce Westbrook.

We have accepted the periods without ordained ministry as a challenge and a great opportunity for the lay people of the church to do and be "the Ministry". At the beginning of 2009 two of our active preachers, Don and Kerrie Needham moved to

Sydney with Kerrie being accepted into ministry training at UTC. We now have five regular preachers and five others who give the message occasionally. Four families take responsibility in turn for our third Sunday Contemporary services in the Hall. Our congregation has been fairly steady around fifty for the last 10 years. About half the congregation are on the Bible reading roster and a significant number take part in leading worship and prayers. Two of our teenage young men have preached with Biblical insight and confidence on a number of occasions, one giving his first sermon at age 15. Three of our elders are authorised Lay Presidents at the Sacraments and two of us conduct funerals as the need arises. Three of us are in the midst of the Marriage Celebrants Course being led by Rev. Bronwen Murphy, much valued Resource Minister for the Macquarie - Darling Presbytery.

Elders and others are active in pastoral care within our congregation and beyond. A significant number of our people are or have been active in community organisations including holding executive positions. Fifteen years ago Mrs Caroline Coombes commenced a Leisure Group and



Ian Weeks and his wife Anne, and with his fellow motorcyclists

this continues to provide fellowship, learning a number of crafts and also gentle exercises and this has obviously filled a felt need in the community. It is held on nine Thursday mornings a term with about 50 participants. On every occasion devotions are held during the morning tea break

There has been good co-operation among the six churches of Grenfell for a long time and this has grown stronger in recent years. The Minister's Fraternal has been replaced by an Inter-Church Council which meets regularly, with two representatives from each Church.

For about eight years we have combined 5th Sunday services with the Anglicans in alternate churches and also cooperate in other ways including prayer services during Easter week.

Each 5th Sunday evening an ecumenical service is held in each church in turn. For two years we have combined eight times a year with the Presbyterians in our respective halls for Contemporary Worship with a band made up of young people from both churches. Scripture in the Public School years 7 and 8 at Henry Lawson High School is arranged on an ecumenical basis.

Our church is very excited that Rev. Ian Weeks and his wife Anne will be ministering to us for nearly three months commencing at the end of August. Ian did the last two years of his High School education at Grenfell Henry Lawson High School.



The return of Ian Weeks

ACC welcomes Ian Weeks back to a leadership role in the confessing movement in the UCA. Ian had a long-tem involvement through EMU (past National President), and is now the new convener of the ACC NSW Movement.

Ian was ordained in the Uniting Church in December 1991 and pastored congregations at Berry-Kangaroo Valley Uniting Churches (1992 - 1998), and Coffs Harbour-Nana Glen Congregations (1998 - 2010).

Before his next placement as Senior Pastor at Belrose UC (Sydney), commencing January 2011, Ian is helping the lay-team ministry at

ACC member congregation Grenfell for three months from August, and will also visit ACC congregations in the Central West area, including Coonabarabran (21-22 August), and Orange. Ian will be visiting congregations on his motorbike and has joined the Ulysses Motorcycle Club.

Ian has completed the Arrow Leadership program, and is a keen promoter of the importance of Christian leadership, and continues his involvement in the wider confessing and renewal movements through the Australian Lausanne Committee and the Lausanne World Congress on Evangelization.

LOCAL CHURCH

SA nurtures new leaders

ACC South Australia is running a highly resourced weekend camp in February 2011 for young and emerging adults who are shaping as leaders in our churches. We will call it the *ACC Emerging Leaders Award* (the award being the free camp). ACC churches in SA are asked to identify one or more key youth/emerging adults (17-30 year olds). The local church will present them with a Certificate, awarding them attendance at the camp.

The camp is designed for a group of between 20 and 40 – a size that allows attenders to bond well with each other and with the support group.

Young Christians today go to a lot of camps, so this one needs to, and will, stand out.

Keynote speaker Tim Hein is lead pastor of CitySoul, a missional church plant in Adelaide's CBD. A sought-after speaker for confer-

ences, he is also a strategic consultant with Capacity Builders, and SA Co-ordinator for Arrow—Australia's peak body for developing young Christian leaders. He'll be joined by respected church and lay leaders, mentors and support staff.

The program features Bible teaching on topics such as being a young leader in the church (like Jeremiah chapter 1; Timothy), teaching on

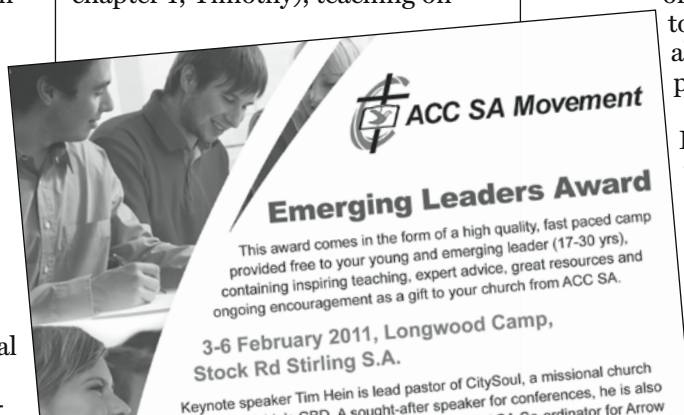
leadership skills, discussion of topical social issues like abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, gambling, drugs and alcohol.

Mixed with this will be worship, prayer times, games, and a Q & A session on issues they face.

The aim is to send them home inspired, both by what they have seen and heard, and by the ACC as an organisation with which to identify. They will also be sent home with a pack of resources.

The camp runs from February 3-6, 2011 at the Longwood camp in Stirling in the Adelaide Hills.

To register: Kevin Fielke, Treasurer ACC SA, 8278 2608; patanga@picknowl.com.au Registrations by 7 November 2010



Working on a 21st century Future

MIRIAM IMMS provides a word of encouragement from Tasmania.

Like so many smaller churches right around our country, we look into 2010 with queries in our minds. What is ahead? What are our finest assets? How do we fulfil Christ's command to go into all the world, including our local community, and live the gospel?

Without the usual regular minister, our own Ministry Team takes its role very responsibly. They planned a whole congregation weekend and called well-known speaker and former EMU field-worker and ACC member Gil Cann from Victoria to lead us in a time of study, reflection and encouragement, over the weekend of 28 -30th May, in *A Vision for the Future*.

We publicised the event widely in local media, and were most encouraged to have solid support from ACC members from around the Hobart area. From Saturday afternoon we looked at *Understanding Our Times* and *Being God's People in the 21st century*. We considered the dramatic changes to society from the 1970s, some of which happened without us even noticing, but have challenged the role of the local church. "Healthy churches", said Gil, "are still God's primary means of demonstrating and furthering His kingdom".

But we are in an era of post-Christendom in which we are actually both chaplains to the faithful but missionaries in a dis-interested world. The way we worship and present the gospel needs a fresh look.

When we meet, we do so as a group coming not so much to worship, but in fact, coming from worship. For in our day when most folk we would love to see in the church are busily out elsewhere, it is our

role from Monday to Saturday that is of immense importance. Gil asked us to look again at our people who gather on Sundays and consider the number we each meet and interact with between regular worship times. Even in our small congregations that number is huge, and of vital importance. Our wonderful Sunday lunch was catered for by a well-known professional chef, from Café Cezanne, in Coff's Harbour, recently come on a 'seachange' to the Channel, so freeing the ladies to be in the studies. Rumpole said he didn't believe in co-incidences, and a bishop said, "Funny thing, when I pray, co-incidences happen!" The Channel Choir enthusiastically joined us for the innovative lunch and sang to us.

This is our church at mission, and when we meet together we need to encourage, listen to other's experiences, and pray for and equip each other for the week ahead.

Miriam Imms is a member of the ACC Tasmanian Southern Cluster

Bishop Nazir-Ali: 'Expect the truth'

ROSLYN PHILLIPS of Family Voice on a fearless Islam expert set to tour Australia

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, who will visit Australia in September, was given a hard time on the BBC TV's HARDtalk program in March. "The Muslim Council of Britain was furious about the things you said [about sharia law]," the interviewer told him. "They said what you should expect from a bishop is more humility ..."

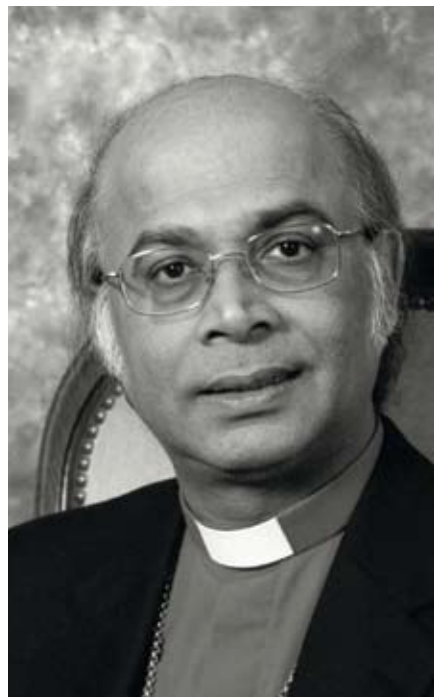
The bishop has studied sharia for 30 years, and he didn't miss a beat. "I think what you should expect from a bishop is the truth!" he said.

Who is this man who speaks out on matters of faith in areas where other church leaders fear to tread?

Michael Nazir-Ali was born in Pakistan to Christian parents in 1949. His father had been a Muslim, but converted to Christianity. In Pakistan today, this act would warrant the death penalty.

Young Michael professed a personal Christian faith as a teenager. He trained for the Anglican ministry in England and returned to Pakistan, where he later became a bishop. He worked among the poor and dispossessed in the Diocese of Raiwind in southern Lahore, but suffered growing persecution under General Zia's sharia law. In 1986, after assaults and death threats, Bishop Nazir-Ali and his family were forced to flee for their lives.

They found refuge in England, where the bishop's intelligence, administrative skills and theological understanding proved very helpful to the Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1989 he was appointed General Secretary of the UK Church Mission Society (known in Australia as the Church Missionary Society). In 1994



Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali

he became Bishop of Rochester in Kent, and later took a seat in the House of Lords. Last year Bishop Nazir-Ali unexpectedly stepped down from the House of Lords and the Rochester diocese, ten years before retirement age. He has now entered a new phase of ministry to the worldwide church, with particular emphasis on Christians who are suffering for their faith.

Bishop Nazir-Ali speaks the truth in love on Islam because, as he says, "all my [extended] family are Muslims."

He also speaks the truth in love about marriage, family and homosexuality. He brings biblical insights into the real world. Don't miss the chance to hear him when he comes in September to Brisbane (14th), Sydney (15th, 16th), Melbourne (17th), Canberra (20th), Adelaide (20th, 21st) and Perth (21st, 22nd).

His visit is sponsored by Family-Voice Australia – for more details, phone 1300 365 965.

What happens next:

- August 20 - NSW ACC Committee 10 am: Haberfield
- September 2-4 ACC Annual Conference and AGM: Camden Uniting Church NSW
Theme: The future of marriage in Australia. Main Speakers include Steve Estherby of Family Voice, Newspaper columnist Angela Shanahan and Joanne Lucas Education Officer for the Life, Marriage & Family Centre for the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney.
- October 5 - SA ACC Committee 5 pm: Glenunga UC
- October 16 - NSW ACC State Meeting: Liverpool UC

ACC PrayerNet

The Power of a Praying Church Acts 4:23-31 (niv)

Luke tells us that the first response to Peter and John's persecution by the religious leaders of their day, as they spoke the message of the gospel with great boldness, was to join together in spontaneous unified prayer.

We can take courage and strength from this type of model. Verse 24 "They raised voices together in prayer to God. 'Sovereign Lord,' they said, 'you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.'" They remembered the Sovereignty of God their Father and we can see this kind of praying that God delights to answer.

For the early Christians, the sovereignty of God was not just a point of doctrine or point of endless debate. No, it was a rock upon which to build their lives.

Let us join together in unity, remembering God's sovereignty. Pray remembering and being comforted, strengthened and empowered knowing that God is in control.

That even in the midst of terrible things, personally, in community, in the Church, and globally God is working out His plan to save sinners. Pray in such a way that Jesus is exalted. Above all difficulty and problems, remember and give thanks for the salvation he has provided in Christ.

Mandy Scott
ACC Prayer Network Liaison Officer
& "PrayerNet" co-ordinator



Jae Head as S.J., Quinton Aaron as Michael Oher and Sandra Bullock as Leigh Anne Tuohy

When chance is not blind chance

The Blind Side

Out on DVD in August is *The Blind Side*. This film is based on the true story of Michael Oher (played by Quinton Aaron) who now plays for the Baltimore Ravens as offensive left tackle. The movie won Sandra Bullock the Best Actress Oscar at the 2010 Academy Awards and was a major box-office financial success surprising some critics.

Michael's home background was one of chronic neglect, homelessness and lack of education, but he eventually ended up in a private Christian school because of his football potential. Here he met the Tuohy family and the mother who would play such an influential part in his life: Leigh Anne Tuohy (played by Sandra Bullock). Leigh Anne, her husband Sean and children Jae and Collins bring Michael into their family and provide the start to a life he could never have had otherwise. They enlist Miss Sue to provide special tuition (wonderful supporting role for Kathy Bates), and his grades reach the required level. There is mostly a good portrayal of the family as they come across as a normal family, and their strong evangelical Christian faith is not presented as weird or unusual. This is a key to the integrity of the film and was apparently something that made Sandra Bullock hesitant in taking on the role. Evangelical Christianity is not highly regarded in Hollywood, and yet as Bill Muehlenberg shows in his perceptive piece on this film and Hollywood, presents a dilemma for the companies which focus on huge

box office receipts. "But love of money tends to triumph over pushing radical leftist agendas, so family-friendly films still keep coming out of Hollywood."

<http://www.billmuehlenberg.com/2010/03/09/the-blind-side-and-hollywood%e2%80%99s-dilemma/>

In the same year, another film about a disadvantaged and abused child was released. *Precious* also won an Academy Award, this one for Best Supporting Actress for Mo'Nique who played the mother of *Precious*, and the contrast in mothering displayed could not have been more marked.

Coincidence versus God incidence.

The Note (2007) is a DVD release from Hallmark TV channel. The movie is based on the book by Christian author Angela Elwell Hunt. She adapted the screenplay of *The Nativity Story*, a movie I reviewed in an early edition of ACCatalyst.

Many of her books are written as modern day parables with a moral theme designed to have people think more about their own life and background.

In *The Note*, Newspaper columnist Peyton MacGruder, played by Genie Francis discovers a hastily scribbled note in the aftermath of a plane crash in the USA.

Genie achieved fame as Laura on *General Hospital* and even made it on the cover of *Newsweek* in 1981, with her on-screen husband for the most watched daytime drama event in TV history.

The note found by Peyton was

the last communication of a father to a child simply given the initial T. Peyton's column 'Heart Healer' is struggling for readers and it finds new life as she begins to track down who T was, while also revisiting some of her own past family experiences. Ted McGinley plays a journalist colleague with family issues of his own and together they are able to help each other see their need for forgiveness. Interestingly McGinley is better known as Jefferson in probably the most significant "anti-family" comedy, *Married with Children*, so this is a significant role reversal for him.

The connections and plot development in *The Note* may remind you of a Charles Dickens novel, but all of us know that there are events we cannot explain by worldly coincidence.

While not produced as a Christian film, this is a film which raises many good questions for discussion, especially about forgiveness, love, relationships and parenting. Hallmark publicized the film in 2007 with a website where people could post their final comment if they only had a minute. This film reminded me of the final words that people on the hi-jacked 9/11 airplanes left for their loved ones as voice messages when they could not speak to them in person. Who would you write a final note to? What would you say?

Peter Bentley
ACC Executive Consultant

Muehlenberg's Blindsight view

Hollywood has a big problem. It is constantly facing a major dilemma involving two well-established facts. Fact number one: The denizens of Hollywood are overwhelmingly secular leftists...

Fact number two: More often than not, the best money-making films are those with a pro-faith and pro-family message...

But if they want to get rich and stay rich, then they have to cater to the tastes of most Americans. They really are in a dilemma. But love of money tends to triumph over pushing radical leftist agendas, so family-friendly films still keep coming out of Hollywood. (See web link in Bentley Review)